

THE GEORGICS OF VIRGIL

BOOKS I & II

LORD BURGHCLERE

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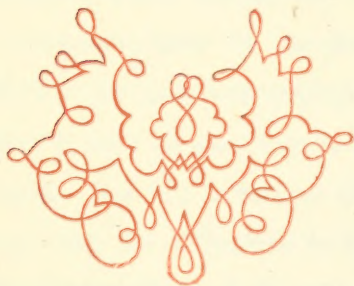
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THE GEORGICS OF VIRGIL

BOOKS I., II.

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE

By LORD BURGHCLERE



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PREFACE

THE *Georgics* as their Greek name γεωργικά implies, mainly treat of matters pertaining to husbandry and the cultivation of the soil. The prosaic science of the farmyard would not at first sight seem to present a promising basis for the poet's art. Yet Virgil undertook the task with evident pleasure, and accomplished it with an ease that is the despair of his translators. Nor can it be said that he shrinks in any way from the difficulties in his path. He attacks the commonplaces of the subject with equal courage and success. He deals with the ordinary methods of tillage and forestry, of cattle-breeding and bee-keeping, with an abundant detail and an almost scientific precision. And never once does his verse lose its exalted character; never once does

his style sink from the grand into the grandiose. He uses that most perfect of poetical instruments, the Latin hexameter, with consummate art. He makes it discourse melody with the skill of a master musician. In one passage its rolling harmonies conjure up the clang and crash of the mountain storm, the rush and roar of the flooding torrent, the thunders of Jove himself. In another fauns, nymphs, and all the citizens of Arcady pass across sunny lawns and forest glades to the lighter measure of his strains. In nothing is he common, in nothing is he incomplete. Everywhere the sense is allied to the rhythm—the rhythm to the sense. Truly is he, as Tennyson sang, a “Lord of Language,” in whose marvellous verse-pictures we find

“All the charm of all the Muses
Often flowering in a lonely word.”

The present translation, begun amidst the bustle of the House of Commons, and completed (as far

PREFACE

as the first and second books are concerned) in the calm of a Highland lodge, owes no small debt of gratitude to various distinguished critics. If it should be fortunate enough to induce some chance reader to turn from an imperfect English rendering to a closer study of the inimitable original, it will have amply accomplished its mission.

B.

ACHALADER,

9th December, 1899.



BOOK I.

THE GEORGICS OF VIRGIL

BOOK I.

THE art of ample harvests ; what glad star
Sanctions the timely tillage of the soil
And bids the marriage of the elm and vine :
The care of beeves, the charge of teeming flocks,
The wisdom needed for the thrifty hive ;
Such, O Maecenas, is the song I sing.

Aid me, ye glorious lights of heaven who guide
Along the firmament the passing year,
Bacchus and bounteous Ceres, since your boons

Changed the Chaonian diet of the world
To ears of lusty corn, and found and blent
The clustered grape in Acheloan cups.

And ye, O Fauns, the rustics' patron gods,
O Fauns and Dryad maids, come hand-in-hand
What time your gifts I sing.

And, Neptune, thou

Who erst with mighty trident smotest earth
And lo! the horse leaped neighing from her side.

Come, Master of the glades, for whose delight
In Ceos' Isle three hundred snow-white steers
Crop the lush brake.

And very Pan himself,

Guardian of flocks, I supplicate. O thou,
Divine Arcadian! Quit thy woodland home,
Thy valleys of Lycaeus: by the love
Thou bearest to thy Maenalus I pray
Thy gracious presence.

Come, Minerva, thou
 The olive-maker,
 And the boy who first
 Taught us the curved plough's use,
 Sylvanus too
 Unearth and bear thy dainty cypresses.

And all ye host of heaven, whose loving care
 Defends our fields—or ye who watch the birth
 Of wilding fruits unsown by man, or ye
 Who loose the bounteous floodgates of the sky
 On cultured glebe—Gods! Goddesses! I call.

And thee, O Caesar—who shalt sit a god
 Enthroned with gods—though thy appointed place
 Be yet unknown—whether thou wilt assume
 The governance of cities and the care
 Of continents, whilst, round about thy brow

Binding thy mother's myrtle, the great globe
Acclaims thee sire of harvests and the lord
Of sun and shower :

Or whether thou wilt come
God of the boundless sea whose shrine supreme
The sailor-folk adore, whilst far-away
Thule obeys thy nod, and Tethys counts
Her child and all her wealth of billows cheap
To win thy kinship.

Or perchance shalt thou,
As some strange Star ruling the lazy months,
Shine forth from heaven where now the Scorpion's
claws
Stretch to Erigone. Lo ! he betimes
Withdraws his fiery grasp and yields thee up
A generous space of sky more than thy meed.

Whiche'er thou wilt—for surely Tartarus
Is hopeless of thy reign, nor thou thyself

Consumed with such fell lust of power (although
True 'tis the Greeks vaunt their Elysian fields,
And Proserpine for all her mother's prayers
Clung to the world below)—whiche'er thou wilt,
O make my pathway smooth, and deign to bless
My rash emprise ; and, pitying with me
These husbandmen who wander leaderless,
Stay not thine instant coming, but be prompt
To school thine ears to mortal litanies.

When springtime comes and brings the warm west
wind,

When from the hoary-headed mountain streams
The molten ice, and all the clodded fields
Crumble and thaw, then let my plough be set
Deep in the tilth, my straining oxen groan,
And stubborn furrows make the ploughshare flame
With a new splendour.

Best that land rewards
Your thrifty farmer's vow which twice the sun
And twice the frost has felt. For him forthwith
Shall be a mighty garnering and his barns
Bursting with grain.

But first our care must be,
Or ever we would drive the iron share
Athwart the glebe in some new plain, to learn
What winds are wont to blow ; the character
And variance of the skies ; the ancient arts
And virtues of the soil ; and eke what crops
This land is apt to bear, and that refuse.
How here the corn springs kindlier—there the vine,
And elsewhere wild grasses and young trees
Wax verdurous.

Look you, how Tmolus sends
Its perfumed saffron ; India ivory ;
Her native incense soft Arabia ; steel

The bare-armed Chalybes ; Pontus again
Rank-odoured castor ; and Epirus' sons
Their breed of mares famed for Olympian palms.

So ever has it been since nature set
Upon earth's several climes her seal eterne
Of primal law. Since that old time when first
With stones Deucalion strewed an empty globe,
And man, hard as the rock, upsprang.

Come, then,

And in the early springtime of the year
See that the lusty oxen till your lands
Where they lie richest, that the upturned clods
May bask and ripen in the timely suns
Of dusty summer ; but where poor they lie
It will suffice to skim September fields
With shallow furrowings. Lest weeds arise,
On the one hand, and choke our smiling crop ;

Or, on the other, barren thirsty soils

Be reft of their scant dew.

Mark this again,

Each other year let your shorn stubbles stay

In restful fallow, so the languid land

May strengthen in its sloth ; or, if ye will,

Beneath another sun sow golden grain

Where once the bean-field shook its copious pods,

Or lank young vetches and harsh lupines grew,

A very rustling grove of fragile stems.

Whether your harvests be or flax, or oats,

Or pale Lethaeian poppy drenched with sleep,

Their constant yield shall scorch the land. Although

Your task will lighten when crops interchange.

And shrink not aye to glut the arid glebe

With the rich farmyard soil, and broadcast fling

O'er your sick acres the uncleanly ash.

Thus in a shift of seeds your lands may take
Rest as in idleness, nor cease the while,
As fallows must, their grateful recompense.
And often you will find it well to burn
The garnered fields and set the flimsy straw
A-crackling in the flames. Whether perchance
The land in this wise finds some unknown force,
Some fat enrichment ; or that every fault
Thereof is purified by fire and all
The useless humours purged ; or that the heat
By its own virtue loosens secret pores
And paths unseen whereby the sap may flow
To the young grasses ; or, it may be, binds
Firmer the earth, and knits the gaping veins,
Lest showers should subtly harm, or the fierce sun
With a too passionate majesty consume,
Or the bleak north winds sear with piercing cold.

Who with his mattock breaks the sleepy clods
And harrows them with hurdles osier-twined
Shall largely serve the land ; nor such a one
Does golden Ceres with indifference eye
From her Olympian heights ; he too does well
Who drives the furrow through the glebe and then
With a cross-ploughing cleaves the up-turned plain,
And tireless disciplines the ground, and rules
Right royally his fields.

Pray, husbandmen,
For summer showers and tranquil winter-time ;
The dust of winter days shall fill the land
With joy, and with a joy most great the corn ;
Never shall Mysia vaunt her tilth so high
And even Gargarus look with wonderment
Upon his granaries.

And what of him
Who hurls the seed, and soldier-wise pursues
The onslaught, grappling the soil, and scattering

The masses of lean sand? Then to his crop
 Summons the flood and leads the attendant rills,
 So when the burning fields are all aglow
 And the herb meet to die, see! from the brink
 Of its steep path he woos the watercourse.
 Hither it tumbles hoarsely murmurous
 And wakes the way-worn stones and, bubbling on,
 Quenches the thirsty plain.

Or him again

Who, lest beneath the over-laden ears
 The haulms be bowed, crops the rank herbage down
 In its young leaf, what time the tender growth
 First tops the trenches :

Or of him who strives

With bibulous sand to suck the stagnant ooze
 Out of the marsh, and finds his special task
 When in some changeful moon the rivers rise
 In turbulent flood, till far and wide the slime

Covers the land, and all the channelled dikes
Sweat with a faint warm reek?

Yet after all,

Ply as we may our arts, toil as we may,
Both man and beast, till and re-till the ground,
No jot the less do we endure the plague
Of the Strymonian crane or noxious goose,
Or bitter-rooted endive, or the bane
Chill shadows cast around.

So hath he willed,

The great All-father, that we husbandmen
Might tread no easy path, since he it was
Who earliest woke the meadows with our craft,
And made our cares the whetstone of our wits,
Nor suffered drowsy sloth to dull his realm.

Before Jove reigned no farmer tilled the soil;
Nor was it meet to set a landmark up
And part the plain. Men sought but common ends;

And mother earth with freer hand unasked
Gave of all things to all.

Then Jove bestowed
A baleful venom on the sable snake.
He bade the wolf to prowl, the sea to rise ;
He shook their dewdrop honey from the leaves,
And hid the fire, and curbed the common flow
Of rivers running wine : and this he did
That necessary custom slow and sure
Should forge the diverse arts by dint of thought,
And in the furrows find the springing corn,
And strike the spark that lurks in living flint.

Then first the hollowed alder smote the flood ;
And sailors told the number of the stars
And called them by their names : the Pleiades,
The Hyads, and Lycaon's flaming Bears.
Then did men learn the art of snaring game,

The trick of bird-lime, and with circling hounds
To ring wide forest glades. And these cast nets
Where the pools deepen in the spacious stream,
Whilst these trailed dripping meshes in the sea.
Then came cold iron and the saw's shrill blade,
Since man till then with wedges clove his logs.

Such the procession of the various crafts.
For toil—relentless toil—is lord of all,
And want and trouble ever prick us on.

But when the day came that the holy groves
Failed of their acorn and their arbutus,
So that Dodona's self denied us food,
Ceres it was who taught the human-folk
How first with iron share to till the land.

Yet straightway trouble falls upon the wheat ;
A plague of mildew eats up all the straw,

And wastrel thistles through the fields uprear
 Their horrent spikes. The crops begin to die ;
 Along the ground there creeps a tangled growth
 Of caltrops, cleavers, and their kind. Then up,
 Lording it o'er the glittering harvest, spring
 Harsh darnels and wild barren oats.

And thus,

Unless you chase the weeds with constant hoe,
 And scare the birds, and prune the darkening shade,
 And with your prayers draw showers from heaven—
 alas !

Your lot shall be with vainly covetous eye
 To watch your neighbours pile their ricks, and then
 Go fill your empty belly in the woods
 Under the shaken oaks.

Now must I tell

What weapons our stout husbandmen should use,
 Since without tools no seed-time can there be
 Nor harvest-time.

First have we, then, the plough,
With frame of toughest timber bent, the share,
The wains of Ceres with their lumbering wheels,
And sleds, and drags, and huge unwieldy rakes ;
Nor Celeus with his equipage forget
Plain wicker though it be, and harrows knit
With arbute-wood, and thy mysterious fan,
Iacchus.

Whoso worthily would win
And wear the glory of the sacred fields,
All these should mind in ample time to store.

Now in the forest bend the living elm
With thy full vigour, beam-wise moulding it
Into the curved shape of a plough ; and fit
Hard-by its end a pole eight feet in length,
Twin earth-boards, and a share-stock double-backed.

But first the linden must be felled to form
Your lightsome yoke, the lofty beech your helve
Whereby the plough's deep courses may be steered ;
And beech and linden hang above the hearth
So that their woods may season in the smoke.

Full many an ancient maxim can I tell,
An you budge not, nor deem it petty work
Too irksome to be learned.

And first, forsooth,
Make smooth with cylinders of mighty bulk,
Your threshing-floor ; let it be wrought by hand
And knit with potter's clay right solidly,
Lest weeds creep through, and so the crumbling soil
Wear into cracks and chinks, and furnish sport
For all our plagues in turn. The tiny mouse
Burrows full oft her subterranean home

And builds her granaries : the purblind mole
Shall scrape her bed : or in his cave you'll find
The toad, and all the monstrous spawn of earth ;
Nor shall your ample store of corn escape
The weevil's havock, or the ant who dreads
A treasure-less old age.

Hearken again,
When you shall mark the almond in the woods
Pranked with a myriad blooms, its branches bent
Heavy with fragrance, and the baby fruits
Wax plentiful, lo ! then shall come to pass
A harvest of like fashion, and a time
Of mighty heat and mighty winnowing ;
But if the wealth of shade be wealth of leaves
And leaves alone, then shall you vainly smite
Your threshing-floor and find the gravid ears
Yield naught but empty chaff.

And many a time

I have seen farmers drug the seeds they sow,
Steep them in nitre and black olive-lees,
That by-and-by the else-delusive pods
May bear right ample burden, and a fruit
Which cooks apace, e'en though your fires be scant.

Yet can I witness that the plant declines,
Though long-time chosen, conned with utmost care,
If human energy and human hands
Fail to search out the fittest year by year.

So are we doomed to speed from bad to worse,
Ever borne backwards, drifting whence we came,
As one whose oars can scarcely hold his boat
Against the stream, who haply slacks his grip.
Then headlong down the torrent is he swept
By the mid-flood.

And list ye well to watch
Arcturus' star, the Birthday of the Kids,
The shining Snake, with eyes as keen as those
Of homing mariners whose stormy course
Hazards the Euxine and the narrow straits
Of oyster-famed Abydos.

When the Scales
With equal poise have meted day and sleep
And cleft the round world in twin moieties
Of light and shade, then up, my masters, up
And speed your steers, and barley broadcast fling
E'en to the verge of winter's surly storms.

Now is the time to sow your crops of flax
And Ceres' poppy, and full time to strain
Over your ploughs, whilst yet dry earth permits
And clouds unbroken float across the sky.

Spring is the seed-time of the bean ; in spring
The ripened furrows welcome Media's plant,
And millet claims our yearly care, what time
Comes with his golden horns the silver Bull
And opes the year's procession, and the Dog
Faces the hostile Star and ceding sinks.
But if you tax your soil for hardy spelt
And wheaten harvests, and your zeal be set
On corn alone, then let the Pleiades
Melt with the dawn, and Ariadne's Crown
Pass with its ardent star, ere you entrust
Your furrows with the necessary seed,
Or, heedless, risk the year's expectancy
To an unready earth.

Many begin
To sow ere Maia sets ; but oft their hopes,
When harvest comes, are mocked with empty ears.

Nathless, if you be pleased to sow the vetch
Or vulgar phasel, nor despise the care
Of the Pelusian lentil, then for you
Boötes at his setting gives the sign
With no uncertain light. Up and begin !
And cease not seed-time till mid-winter comes.

For to this purpose doth the golden sun
Order his round meted in several terms
By the twelve constellations of the world.
Five Zones possess the heavens, and one thereof
Glowes scarlet with the lustre of the sun
For aye, and aye with the sun's fire is scorched ;
Whilst far away on utmost right and left
Stretch to the distant poles two frozen tracts,
Sea-green with ice, and black with murky storms ;
And other twain 'twixt these and the mid-zone
The gods vouchsafed in grace to weakling men,

And slant-wise carved between them both a way
 Whereon the due procession of the signs
 Should wheel.

Mark how beyond Rhipoean peaks
 The world towers steep to the north, but southward
 sinks
 Sheer down to Libya. High above our heads
 One pole for ever soars ; the other views
 Dark Styx and spectres of the nether world
 Under our feet.

The mighty Snake above
 Like to a river winds his sinuous coil
 Around—between the Bears, the Bears who shun
 The touch of Ocean.

And below, 'tis said,
 Eternal night in timeless silence broods
 Wrapped, as a pall, in ever-deepening gloom ;

Or else from us Aurora journeys back
Thither, and there re-lumes the day, and so
Whilst we are freshened with the morning breath
Of sunrise horses panting up the sky,
There ruddy Vesper lights his twilight torch.

And thus it is we learn betimes to tell
The wayward changes of the sky, and mark
Seed-time and harvest-time, and when it fits
To dip our oars into the treacherous calm
And launch our furnished fleets, and when to fell
The timely Forest Pine.

Ay, not in vain

We watch the birth and death-day of the Signs,
And the Four Seasons, diverse each from each,
That make the perfect year.

If now and then

The chill rains keep the husbandman at home,
How many a task doth he fulfil at ease,

Which, did the sun shine, would be scamped apace.
The ploughman hammers at the hardened fang
Of his blunt share, scoops wine-tubs out of trees,
Or brands his flock, or stamps his numbered sacks.
Whilst others sharpen stakes and two-pronged forks,
Or twist Amerian osiers into bonds
To curb the trailing vine.

Others, again,
Are busy weaving baskets from the shoots
Of limber thorn.

No time than this more meet
To roast your grain, or grind it at the mill.
Why on the very Festivals themselves
Some work at least nor gods nor men forbid :
The saintliest conscience scruples not to tap
The flooded watercourse, or fence the corn,
Or snare the birds, or burn the briars, or plunge
Your bleating flocks into the wholesome brook.

And often comes the peasant with his ass
Crawling from market, heavy-laden, home
With apples in cheap plenty on its back,
Or oil, or pitch, or mill-stones deftly hewed.

And for our craft moon after moon vouchsafes
Days in an ordered measure of good luck.
Beware the fifth : for on the fifth were born
The Furies and wan Orcus, King of Death :
And with unholy travail did the earth
Iapetus and Caeus bear and him,
The fell Typhoeus, all the Titan brood
Who banded for the downfall of high heaven.
Thrice did they strive, and strive forsooth to pile
Ossa on Pelion, and on Ossa's height
Again to heave Olympus with her woods ;
And thrice the Father with his lightning smote
And scattered far and wide the mountain mass.

Add seven to ten : that day shall haply fall
To plant your vineyards, or to train your steers,
Or wed the warp and woof ; the ninth again
Smiles upon truancy, but frowns on theft.

And many a task, I wot, will better fare
In the cool night-watch, or at break of day
When all the fields are drenched with morning dew.
By night crisp stubble-land and drouthy mead
Are kindlier mowed : for on the math there falls
No lack of suppling moisture with the night.

And one I knew would work in winter-tide
The livelong night beside the flickering fire,
To fashion torches with his keen-edged blade.
The while his good wife sung the time away
Over her task and drove athwart the web
Her glancing shuttle, or with vine leaf skimmed

The luscious must that simmered in the pot
And cooked above the flame.

But the red corn
Is reaped in noonday heat, and at mid-noon
We thresh the ripened ears. Stripped must we plough
And stripped must sow. 'Tis chilly winter brings
Our holidays, when farmers with the frost
Are chiefly busied to enjoy their gains,
Make merry with their gossips, and rejoice
In mutual junketings. Lo! winter calls
And, jovial, bids us cast our cares away ;
As mariners, whose burdened argosy
Rides safe at last in port, full of content
Garland their ship with flowers.

Winter's the time
To strip the oak-tree of its mast and cull
Red myrtle and the olive and the bay,

Set snares for cranes and nets to trap the stag,
Hunt long-eared hares, and whirl your hempen sling
To strike the deer with Balearic bolt,
When snows lie deep in drifts, when all the streams
Hurtle with ice.

And haply must I sing
Of autumn stars and autumn's fitful mood,
And what our husbandmen must watch and ward
When the days shorten and hot summer wanes?
Or when the spring pours down her wealth of showers
On fields of tremulous wheat, or grass-green corn
That burgeons with the milky grain?

How oft,
Just as the farmer calls his men afield
To reap his golden acres, and begins
Himself to lop the brittle barley haulm,
Have I not seen the embattled winds arise
And surge and clash in universal war,

Uproot wide stretches of the ripened grain
And toss them to the sky ; whilst round and round
In the black eddies of the storm there whirls
Swift flight of stalks and straws.

And oft again

The floods of heaven in endless squadrons come,
Mustering the clouds from far and near and mass
In one grim tempest all the murky rains :
Down falls the deluge : down the firmament
Tumbles its torrent-streams, and sweeps away
All our glad harvest, all our oxen's toil ;
The dikes fill up, the rivers in their beds
Roar as they rise, and every creek of the sea
Frets with the angry panting of the waves.

And he, the Father, girt in midnight clouds
Hurls with an arm of fire his thunderbolts ;
And the great world doth quake ; and wild beasts flee,
And hearts of human-folk sink low with fear ;

And when with flaming brand he strikes the peak
Of Athos, Rhodope, or high Ceraun,
The winds redouble and the storm apace
Thickens ; and now the woodland, now the shore,
Wails with each giant blast in agony.

And since this dread is ever thine, watch well
The seasons of the heavens and their signs :
What coign of space cold Saturn's star affects ;
Along what orbit fiery Mercury roams.

And most of all adore the gods ; and when
Late winter wanes, and gentle spring is here,
Haste in some pleasant mead to celebrate
Those yearly rites which mighty Ceres claims.
For wine is ripest then, and lambs are fat ;
And sweet is sleep amidst well-shaded hills.

So call thy country youth and bid them pray
To Ceres for thee, blending to her joy
Milk and the honeycomb and mellow wine.
And three times let the kindly victim go
Round the green corn, and all thy merry band
Shout as they follow, calling Ceres down
To dwell with us. Nor when the harvest comes
Let any put his sickle to the awn,
Ere crowned with oaken leaves he joins in song
And rustic dance to do our Ceres grace.

And that we might foretell by certain signs,
Or heat, or rain, or winds that speed the frost,
The mighty Father has himself ordained
The warnings of the moon month after month :
What tokens mark the lull of southern blasts,
And what the signals—noted oft—that bid
The farmer keep his cattle nigh the byre.

See, when a gale springs up, how on the nonce
The instant anger of the troubled deep
Foams in the friths and all the mountains ring
With clang and crash ; meanwhile the distant shore
Throbs with tumultous echoes and anon
A murmurous crowd of voices fills the woods.
And now the billows scarce can stay their dash
On hull and keel, what time the speedy gulls
Wing screaming from mid-ocean to the shore,
The sea-fowl make a playground of the glebe,
The herons flying from their fenny haunts
Float high above the clouds.

And you shall see
Full often, when the wind is close at hand,
The stars themselves shoot headlong from the sky ;
And as they trail their long-drawn tracks of flame
Silver the sable night ; often again
Dead leaf and flimsy chaff fly here and there,
Or frolic feathers skim across the wave.

But when the region of the truculent North
Blazes with lightning, and the thunder shakes
Eurus' and Zephyr's dwelling-place alike,
Then dikes are full, and all the country-side
Swims with the flood, and mariners at sea
Furl their wet sails.

For never yet did rain
Strike any man unwarned : or he might note
Cloud-loving cranes, when storms begin to brew,
Swoop to the abysmal shelter of the vale,
Or mark the heifer gazing at the sky
With broadening nostrils scent the troubled breeze,
Or flashing swallow flit around the mere,
Or in the marsh frogs chant their ancient plaint.

And many a time the thrifty emmet bears
Out of her secret store-houses her eggs
By narrow well-worn pathways, or on high

A giant rainbow drinks the dew, or now
The army of the rooks with serried wings
Jangle and jar as in a long array
They quit their feeding-grounds.

Anon there come

Tribes of the sea-fowl (such as quest for food
In Asian fields by fair Caÿster's pools)
And jostle one another as they crowd
To toss the dewdrop water plenteously
Over their feathered sides, and now they dip
Their heads beneath the waves, and now they run
Into the tide, and revel in their bath
For very wantonness.

And you shall mark

The impish raven stalk the shore apart,
And with a mighty caw invoke the rain.
Even the maidens working round the lamp
O' nights foretell a tempest, when the oil

Sputters and sparkles and great mushroom growths
Gather along the wick.

Nor are less clear
The signs of cloudless calms and sunny skies
Than the storm heralds : for the stars shall show
Like chiselled discs, and the moon rise unstained
By any borrowed splendour of the sun,
Nor lank cloud-fleeces float across the sky :
Nor Thetis' darling fowl, the Halcyons,
Towards the waning sunlight on the shore
Unfurl their wings, and the uncleanly swine
Forget to toss their litter to and fro.
The mist descends and broods along the plain,
The owl on the gable keeps her sunset watch
And plagues the night with ineffectual hoot.

And on the crystal air there soars in sight
Nisus, and she who chastisement must reap,
Scylla, for rapine of the purple lock.

And wheresoever with her fugitive wings
She cleaves the breeze, lo! on the wind there sails
With shrilly clamour close upon her track
Nisus the foe, Nisus the terrible.
And wheresoever Nisus mounts the wind,
Lo! Scylla flutters as with fugitive wings
She cleaves the breeze.

The rooks in bated tones

Thrice and again repeat a softened note,
And you shall hear them in their roost above
Chattering to one another in the leaves,
Thrilled with I know not what mysterious charm.

And the storm spent, how gleefully they hie
Home to their callow youngsters in the nests.
And this they do, methinks, not that the gods
Have portioned them some special gift, or fate
Bestowed a deeper sense of things to be ;

But, when the storm and fitful mists of heaven
Shift in their course and Jove with gale and shower
Contracts the rarer atoms and makes rare
The dense, then do their spirits suffer change,
And other pulses stir their hearts awhile,
Other than when the wind-tost clouds were rife.
And thence the wild bird's chorus in the fields,
And thence the gladness of the kine, and thence
The Paeon of the rooks.

But the swift suns
And the procession of the moons watch well,
So shall the morn not fool you, nor the night
Trap with her tranquil snares.

For if the moon
With a blurred crescent frame the darkling air,
Ploughmen and mariners be warned in time
A mighty rain is nigh ; but if her face

Maidenlike mantles with a blush, the wind
Is near ; since alway Phoebe's tender gold
Turns ruby in the wind. Ye well may trust
The counsel her fourth birthday brings, and if
Pure and unstained she sail across the sky
With flawless crescent, lo ! that livelong day
Ay, and the days that it begets, shall pass
Windless and rainless till the month be gone,
And sailors safe on shore to Panope,
Glaucus, and Melicertes, Ino's son,
Shall pay their vows.

And signs the sun shall give
Orient, and when he plunges in the waves.
The surest signs attend the sun, or those
He brings with early morn, or with the stars.

When, shrouded in the mist, a demi-orb,
He flecks with dappled hues the birth of day,

Beware the rain ; for speeding from the sea
Comes Notus, foe to branch and blade and beast.
Or when his morning rays loom through a mass
Of riven cloud, or when the dawn appears
Pale from the saffron chamber of her lord,
Lo ! sorry safeguard shall your vine leaves prove
To the ripe grape ; so fierce the clattering hail
Shall dance upon the roofs.

But even more,
Methinks, than all of these, his journey done,
It boots to mark the fashion of his flight.
For often then do variant colours pass
Across his face ; whereof a scarlet flame
Warns us of wind, and purple dusk of rain.
But if the dusk and crimson fire be blent,
Then rain and wind and storm alike shall rage
In universal broil. Let no man say
That I should put to sea on such a night,
Or loose my cable from its anchorage.

But if, whene'er he gives us back the day,
Or veils the gift again, his orb shine clear,
Then of a truth the clouds shall frown in vain,
And tree-tops rustle in the bright north wind.

And so, in fine, what tale the twilight tells,
Or what fair breeze shall blow the clouds away,
Or what the purpose of the wet south wind,
All these the sun shall show. And who dare call
The sun false seer?

Nay, more, he oft foretells
The march of black revolt, and the ferment
Of underground rebellion.

Who but he,
In pity for dead Caesar and for Rome,
Shrouded his splendour in a lurid gloom,
Whilst an unholy world looked on aghast,
Dreading eternal night?

Those were the days,
Forsooth, of portents from the land and sea,
Ill-omened dogs, and birds of doom.

And oft
Did we not view the riven furnaces
Of Etna roll their seething waves along
The country of the Cyclops, flooding forth
In streams of molten rock and spheres of flame!
And all the sky of Germany was filled
With noise of battle; and strange shudders shook
The mountain Alps.

And up and down the land,
Cleaving the silence of the sacred groves,
Sounded a voice of marvel, and there came
In the dusk twilight shadows of the dead
Wondrously pale; and O! the horror of it!
Beasts spake like men.

The rivers ceased to flow,
And the earth opened, and great drops of sweat
Gathered upon the bronzes in the fanes,
And sculptured ivory shed grievous tears ;
Whilst with his frenzied flood Eridanus,
The prince of rivers, whirled the woods away,
And swept the cattle and their byres alike
Across the vasty plain.

And in those days
The ominous entrails of the sacrifice
Ceased not to threaten, and the wells ran blood,
And in the city street there rang o' nights
The howl of the wolf.

And down a fleckless heaven
Streamed untold thunderbolts, and doomful stars
Past numbering.

Then did Philippi see

Twice in unnatural combat Rome meet Rome,
And hear the clash of kindred swords ; and twice
The plains of Thrace and Macedon drank deep
Of Roman blood : and the gods deemed it just.

So in those regions shall it come to pass,
That ploughmen, as they till the massy earth,
May light on Roman spears time-worn with rust ;
Or with a clumsy mattock strike perchance
Some dead man's morion, and then view aghast
The giant bones within their cloven tomb.

Gods of our fatherland ! Gods of our homes !
O Romulus and Mother Vesta, hear !
Guardians of Tiber and the Palatine !
Grant that this royal youth, who still is ours,
Become the saviour of a ruined world !

Forbid it not! For surely long ago—
Ay, to the full—our blood has washed away
The guilt of Troy and false Laomedon.
And long ago the envious halls of heaven
Have pined for Caesar, making as their plaint
That he should heed the triumphs of this world,
A world forsooth where wrong and right are blent,
A world that teems with war, a world that reeks
With countless crime, where evermore the plough
Lacks its due honour, and the hind is forced
Far from his desolate fields, and reaping-hooks
Are straightened into swords.

Lo! to the East

The tumult of Euphrates, to the West
Germania cries for war, and close at hand
Our neighbour cities break their leaguèd troth
And rush to battle! Fratricidal Mars
Rages from pole to pole.

So chariots

Bound from the bars and dash along the course,
Vainly the driver draws the bit, his steeds
Whirl him where'er they will ; and thus the car
Speeds to its goal unheedful of the rein.

BOOK II.

BOOK II.

So far of tillage and the sovereign stars.
Now be my song of Bacchus, nor forget
His bosky thickets and the fruit that decks
The tardy olive.

Come, Lenaeon ! come,
Lord of the winepress, Father of the vine !
For now is nature laden with thy boons,
And by thy bounty all the joyous earth
Teems with the grape-clad autumn, and the vats
Foam with the brimming vintage :

Bacchus, come !

Lord of the winepress, Father of the vine !
Strip off thy buskins, bare thy comely feet
And plunge knee-deep into the purple must.

First will I tell of trees and bid you mark
The manifold order of their birth.

How some

Spring into being, spreading far and wide
At no man's asking, of their own intent ;
And fill the meads and fringe the winding streams.
Such are the poplars, such the pliant broom,
The supple osier, and the sea-green groves
Of leafy willows whitening in the wind.

Others again are born of scattered seeds :
The lofty chestnut, and the oak who bears
Jove's glory in his boughs, the forest king ;
And kindred groves from whose oracular leaves
Greece hears her fate.

And some there are, like elms

And cherry-trees, around whose fostering roots
A very thicket springs of youngling plants :

Even so the baby laurel of the Muse
Nestles beneath its mother's ample shade.

This was primeval nature's plan : and hence
Sprang all the verdurous glory of the woods,
Of leafy bosage and of holy grove.

But by-and-by men happed on other ways,
Which practised art in time made manifest,
And rent from off the delicate mother stem
The fresh young slips and set them trench by trench ;
Or planted out the ground with poles, or stocks
Cleft quarterwise, or sharpened stakes.

Again,

Some kinds there are who bide the archèd growth
Of their sunk scions, and the shoots that spring
Quick of their quick out of a common soil ;

Or of their roots ask naught, whose topmost spray
The gardener in his pruning scruples not
To render trustfully to mother earth.

See, too, the marvel of the olive branch
How from its sapless timber, dry and hewn,
Issues a living root.

And you may mark
Trees innocently interchange their boughs :
So pears transformed yield apples ; plum-trees glow
With stoney cornel-fruit incarnadine.

Come, then, to work, my husbandmen, and learn
How in their several kinds our plants are reared,
Mellow the wilding fruits with skilful toil,
And scorn to let your acres waste in sloth.
Think you what joy was his who bade the vine
Teem upon Ismarus and clothed Taburne
With one vast raiment of grey olive groves.

And thou, Maecenas, lustre of my life,
Who art the sovereign partner of my fame,
I pray thy presence, one with me partake
This new emprise, and towards the broadening deep
Unfurl thy swelling sails.

And yet, methinks,
I scarce can hope to compass all my aim
Within this verse. No! though a hundred tongues
Were mine, and mine a hundred mouths, and mine
A voice of bronze !

So let our galley glide
Around the fringes of the shore. Behold !
The land is near ; nor will I stay our course
With poet's fantasy, or tedious phrase.

Various the nature of the forest tribes.
Some, to the luminous province of the sky

Though towering self-begot, are void of fruit,
Yet hale and lusty, since in mother earth
A certain native virtue ever dwells,
Nathless, if you ingraft the barren branch,
Or in some trench, tilled by laborious spade,
Plant them anew, lo ! even these shall shift
Their wildwood temper, nor be slow, when schooled,
To follow wheresoe'er your science calls.

And likewise so the sterile shoots, that grow
Round the deep-rooted boles, shall bear betimes,
If one by one they spaciously are set
O'er ample fields. Else ever does the shade,
Cast by their giant mother's verdurous gloom,
Filch the young buds and blight the timely yield
Worn with endeavour.

Trees that spring chance-born
Wax sluggishly, whose leafy shade abides
Our unborn heirs ; even thus the dwindling fruit
Forgets its ancient virtue, and the vine
Bears sorry grapes meet but for larcenous birds.

And so we see toil's tribute must be paid
For all alike, and all in trenches ranked,
And all by labour diligently trained.

Methinks the olive best repays our care
When bred from parent stocks, the grape from slips,
And Paphian myrtle from the perfect trunk.
From shoots tough hazel springs, and mighty ash,
Poplar, whose leafage crowns Alcides' brow,
And the Chaonian acorn dear to Jove.
So the proud palm is born, and thou, O fir,
Who in due time shalt brave the perilous sea.

But by ingraftment prickly arbute bears
Harvest of almonds ; barren plane trees teem
With lusty apples ; beech and rowan bloom
All silver with the petals of the pear
And snowy chestnut ; whilst beneath the elms
Swine munch their full of acorns.

But the arts
Of budding and ingraftment are not one.
For mark you where amidst the bark of the stem,
Bursting their filmy tunics, buds peer forth
How gardeners carve a tiny lurking-place
In these same nodes ; wherein they prison germs
Plucked from some stranger tree, and bid them wax
One with the sappy rind.

But when they graft,
The knotless trunk is lopped, and ways are cleft

With wedges to the core ; where fecund slips
 Are straightway set ; and in a little while,
 Lo ! a vast tree, with ample boughs bedecked,
 Leaps to high heaven, and marvels at strange leaves,
 Strange fruit—her own yet not her own.

Again

No kind of tree is single in itself—
 Lotus, nor willow branch, nor lusty elm,
 Nor Cretan cypress ; neither changelessly
 Do unctuous olives grow—oblong are some,
 Some shuttle-shaped, and others plucked unripe ;
 Nor do the orchards of Alcinous,
 Whether of Crustumine or Syrian pears
 Or ponderous Wardens, spring from selfsame shoots ;
 Nor in the vineyards of Methymnia
 Does Lesbos gather vintages like those
 Which wreathe our Latin trees.

Of grapes we know

White Mareotic, and the Thasian,
(These for stiff soils, and those for lighter apt)
Psithians more meet for raisin wine, Lagenes,
Whose subtle juice anon betrays the feet
And knots the tongue ; Rath-ripe and Purple-hued.
And thou, O Rhoetic wine ! I search for song
To hymn thee duly ; nathless seek thou not
To vie with our Falernian cellarage.
Strong Aminecan, who the homage claims
Of Tmolus and imperial Phance ;
And small Argitis wine, which rivals both
For bulk of must and power to last the years.
Nor can I pass thee by, O Rhodian grape !
Dear to the gods and to the second dish ;
Nor, Bumast with exuberant clusters, thee !

But numbers lack to mark each name and kind,
Nor boots it of a truth to tell their tale.

Methinks the man, who sought such numbering,
Would list to reckon up the grains of sand,
Whirled by the West winds over Libyan wastes,
Or, when the wilder passion of the East
Falls on our argosies, would count the waves
Which the Ionic ocean rolls ashore.

But every tree springs not in every soil,
Willows are native of the streams ; the marsh
Bears alder in its ooze, and stoney braes
The barren ash, whilst myrtles most delight
In the sea fringes ; and your vineyard loves
Broad sunny slopes, and yews the icy North.

Behold the ends of the earth tilled for men's use,
From where the eastern Arab makes his home
To where the painted Scythian dwells, and mark
How every tree claims its allotted land :

India alone black ebony doth bear,
And Saba boasts her frankincense alone.

What need to tell thee of the dewy balm
That perfumed stems distil, or berried fruit
Of evergreen acanthus? Ethiop groves
All silvered with soft down? or how they comb
A silken fleece from leaves in far Cathay?
Or of that utmost corner of the world
Hard by the sea, where Indian forests grow
Such that no shaft may cleave its airy way
Above the tree-tops?—and, i' faith, that race
Is not behindhand in the bowman's craft.

Media, again, bears citron sour of juice
With clinging savour, blessed antidote
To purge the deadly poison from our bones
Whene'er fell step-dames brew the baleful cup,

Mingling their simples with unholy charm.
In truth a stately tree, and for its form
Most like a bay ; yea, truly did it shed
The selfsame scent abroad a bay 'twould be.
Its leaf defies all tempest, and its flower
Clings close beyond compare ; wherewith the Medes
Heal noisome rheums and old men's lack of breath.

Yet neither wealthiest Media's citron groves,
Nor the fair stream of Ganges, nor the tide
Of Hermus flooding thick with gold, can mate
Thy glories, Italy ! Nay, not the Ind,
Nor Bactra, nor Panchaia's plain that reeks
With frankincense.

For in this land of ours
No oxen, breathing flame, have ever ploughed
A tilth to sow the giant dragon's teeth,
Nor human harvest bristled through the plain
With serried spears and casques.

But here abound

The plenteous fruits of earth, and Massic wines,
And olive trees, and goodly herds of steers ;
Hence comes the mettled courser to the wars ;
Hence thy white kine, Clitumnus ; hence the bull,
The sovereign sacrifice, who oft has led,
Besprent with lustral waters, templewards
The victor chariots of triumphant Rome.
Here dwells eternal spring, here summer reigns
O'er months beyond her sway ; twice doth the flock
Bring forth, twice doth the orchard fruit.

And here,

In this our land, no savage tiger prowls,
No angry lion's whelp, no wolf's-bane tricks
The hapless gatherer, no scaly snake
Hurries its monstrous rings along the ground
Or winds in circling coil those vasty lengths.

Yet more. What stately cities without count,
Look you, are ours! What handicraft of art!
What wealth of towns niched high on craggy steep
By mortal hand! What rivers gliding past
Those time-worn battlements!

Or shall I tell
Of the great seas that wash our either shore?
Or sing the spacious glory of our lakes?
Thee, Larius, the mightiest, and thee,
Fretting thy billows with the very roar
Of the sea's self, Benacus?

Will you hear
Anon of havens, and the giant bar
That dams the Lucrine—how the ocean chafes
With thunderous might what time the Julian port
Rings with the baffled flood, and Tuscan tides
Come surging up the channels of Aверne?

This is the land whose veins were wont erstwhile
To stream with silver and with copper ores,
And flush with plenteous gold.

In this same land
A very breed of heroes was begot :
Men of the Marsi, and their Sabine kin,
The Volscian pikemen, and the hardy tribe
Of Ligures.

Here Marcii, Decii sprung,
Noble Camilli, and the Scipios twain,
Twin thunderbolts of war :

And, greatest, thou,
Triumphant Caesar, who, fresh laurel-crowned
In Asia's utmost zone, dost bar betimes
Yon craven Indian from our Roman hills.

Hail! land of Saturn, mighty mother, hail!
Mother of noble harvests—noble men!
For thee, O mother, shall my Muse essay
The glory and the art of olden time,
For thee unseal the holy springs of eld,
And through the towns of Rome chant Hesiod's lay.

Now turn we to the temper of our soils;
Their force, their colour, and their power to bear.
And first of land unyielding to the plough
And churlish mountain-sides, and brambled fields .
Of stones and hungry marl—these make the joy
Of long-lived olives, such as Pallas loves.
And for a sign see oleasters spring
Thick on the selfsame spot and strew the ground
With wilding fruit.

But where the soil is fat
And joyous with sweet wells, or where the plain,
All lush with grasses, teems with plenteousness,
Such land as we are oft-times wont to view
Far down the mountain in some hollow vale,
Where drips the rivulet from steepy rocks
And brings the kindly ooze—a plain, forsooth,
Which breasts the south and cherishes the fern,
That foe to ploughshares—here your grape shall wax
Full lustily anon, with bounteous floods
Of wine, here shall your clusters amply grow,
And brew such liquor as from golden bowls
Flows for the gods' delight whene'er we hear
Hard by the altar the sleek Tuscan blow
His ivory pipe, and on the groaning dish
Men offer up a steamy sacrifice.

But if your bent be rather to the kine,
To nurture calves, and lambs, and kids that mar
The tender shoots, then seek the fertile meads
Of far-away Tarentum, and such plains
As luckless Mantua lost, where snow-white swans
Feed on the sedgy brooks ; your herds shall find
No lack of pasture there or limpid wells.
Nay, you shall see the very grass they crop
Throughout the lengthy day renewed afresh
By the cool dews of one brief summer night.

Dark soils and rich beneath the ploughshare's stroke
With crumbling mould—a character we ape
By tilth—are best for corn ; nor shall you view
From ever another field so many wains
Dragged homewards by the slowly-pacing steers.

Nor is that soil inept, whence husbandmen
Have, all impatient, cleared the trees, and hewed

The longtime cumbering groves, and, root and branch,
Despoiled the ancient homestead of the birds,
Who from their nests forlorn speed to high heaven,
What time the field, once their's and nature's, gleams
Burnished by ardent shares.

And, look you, now,
How the lean gravel on the hillside slope
Can barely furnish pasture for the bees
Of lowly lavender and rosemary.
How marl and meagre sandstone, honeycombed
By dusky water snakes, declare the soil
Beyond all other earths a toothsome feast
For coiling serpents and a labyrinth
Wherein their brood may lurk.

But land which fumes
With subtle mist and drift of dewy reek,
Which drinks the moisture deep into itself

And yields it back at will, which clothes the lawns
With an unfailing robe of fresh young grass,
Nor frets the iron ploughshare with salt rust,
That is a land whose vines shall wreathe your elms
With lavish vintages, whose olives teem,
Whose soil your husbandry shall surely prove
A friend to kine, a servant to the plough.
Such land does wealthy Capua till, such land
Lies round about Vesuvius and her heights,
Or where capricious Clanius threatens doom
To lone Acerræ.

Now will I disclose
How you shall tell your soils.

Say that you seek
If land beyond its wont be light or dense—
Seeing this loves the corn and that the grape,

Ceres the denser, but the slacker mould,
Lycæus, thee.

Choose you a fitting spot
And bid a pit be deeply dug in ground
Closely compact : then shovel back the earth—
Ay, every jot—and tread the surface smooth.
And if through lack of stuff it fail to fill
The utmost brim, be sure your soil is light,
More apt for cattle and the generous grape.

But when the earth refuses to return
From whence it came and overtops the pit
In its replenishment, 'tis dense with clay ;
Beware the unyielding clod, the stubborn ridge,
And yoke your sturdiest team to break the ground.

Whilst for that salty soil which folk term sour—
Hapless for harvest, hostile to the plough,

Whose vines gainsay their lineage, fruits their name,
This shall its token be :

Go pluck you down
From where they hang beneath the smoke-stained
roof

Your osier baskets woven close that serve
As colanders for wine. Therein bestow
This evil earth with sweet spring water mixed
And press it to the full ; and you shall see
The moisture slowly ooze and giant drops
Drip through the wicker-work ; whereof the taste
Tells a plain tale in truth, and twists awry
The mouths of those who tempt its bitterness.

Rich soils thus briefly shall you know ; for mark
How, as you toss from hand to hand the mould,
It crumbles never, but in handling cleaves
Pitch-fashion to the palm. Surpassing tall

Grow grasses in dank earth whose nature teems
Beyond due measure.

May my field be quit
Of such abundance, nor my firstling ears
Burgeon in over-lusty soil !

Or light,
Or heavy lands their character betray
By their sheer weight. A single glance foretells
The blackness of the earth, or what the hue
Of this or that ; but cold's a curse most hard
For our conclusions. Only now and then
Malignant yews, dusk ivy-tods, and pines
Vouchsafe a hint.

Now, having heeded well
These counsels, be ye sure in ample time
To thoroughly bake your soil, nor stint the plough

Trenching the very mountain-side, nor fail
To lay your upturned furrows longtime bare
In the north winds, or ever you implant
The joyous children of the vine.

Those fields
Are best whose crumbling mould lies loose—a task
Which winds and chilly frosts partake, and he,
The brawny delver, tossing to and fro
His scattered acres.

Now those husbandmen
Whose caution naught escapes, search out betimes
Twin soils, whereof one nurses for your trees
The infant vines, the other by-and-by
Shall welcome them out-planted row by row,
Lest a too sudden shift to novel earth
Estrange the nurseling grape.

Nay, but they note

(So each should stand again as erst it stood,)
The heavens' aspect on each several stem :
Here, that it bore the brunt of southern suns,
There, that it turned its back upon the pole,
Of such great moment are these youthful moods.

Whether hillside or plain best fit the vines
Let your first question be. If 'tis a plain
Whose fertile field you purpose for your plot,
Plant close ; no laggard shall the wine god prove
In such abundant growth. But if your choice
Be for broad slopes of mountain, or a soil
Crested with knolls, then largely spread your ranks.
Nathless, each alley with its straight-drawn path
Must, as you set your trees, most nicely square :
Even as a legion in some giant fight
Deploys its cohort train, and stands to arms

In open field with due array of war
Ere the grim clash of battle has begun,
Whilst all the landscape ripples like a sea
Of radiant brass, and Mars between the hosts
Hovers in doubt,

So let your vineyard through
Be meted out in equal avenues.
Not that alone our idle fancy feeds
On such a sight, but rather that the land
In this wise only deals a share of strength
To all alike, and boughs find space to spread.

Now may you ask what depth your trenches need.
Well, for a vine I would not fear to trust
A slender furrow. Trees strike deeper down,
Into the very bowels of the earth :
And chief the sovereign oak, which sends its roots

So far towards Tartarus as towers its crown
Up to the winds of heaven.

Hence nor gales,
Nor rain, nor winter storms can lay it low :
Unmoved it stands and triumphs, as time rolls,
O'er many a generation, many an age
Of mortal men by the sheer force of life ;
Stretching afar this way and that a might
Of branchèd arms, whilst its midself upholds
Burdens of shade.

Let not your vineyards slope
Down to the sunset ; nor amongst the grapes
Plant hazel bushes ; nor for cuttings choose
The topmost shoot that decks or tree or vine—
So mighty is their love of earth ; nor wound
With blunted knife your scions ; neither set

Wild olives in their midst. For oftentimes
Some heedless husbandman lets fall a spark
Which, by the oily rind at first concealed,
Seizes the solid trunk, and shoots aloft
Amongst the leafage, waking with a roar
The skyward air : then, wending on its way,
Lords it o'er branch and utmost bough supreme,
Wraps all the boscase with a cloak of fire,
And, close compacted in a murky reek,
Belches black clouds to heaven.

Most dire its rage

When from on high storms swoop upon the woods,
And the gale fresh'ning hurries flame on flame.
Lo! then the vines are stricken in their roots,
Nor shall the knife restore them, nor the earth
Teem, as of yore, with all their wealth of green ;
Only wild barren olives, bitter leaved,
Reign in their place.

Let none, however shrewd,
Win you, what time the north wind blows, to stir
The hardened soil, for now doth winter keep
Your lands close pent with ice, nor lets the slip
Implanted strike its frost-bound root deep down
Into the earth.

'Tis best to plant your vines
When with the blush of spring comes homing back
The silver bird by snakes abhorred ; or when,
Ere the first frosts of autumn, the swift sun
Scarce touches winter with his chariot steeds,
Though summer-time be spent.

Oh, but the spring !
The spring that loves the green-wood and befriends
The forest trees ! In spring the heaving earth
Craves for the fruitful seed.

Then from on high

Comes Father Æther, the omnipotent,
And pours his fertile showers into the lap
Of a glad spouse, and quickens all her yield
One in his vastness with her vasty self.
Then the lone copses ring with song of birds,
And the herds couple on their wonted days.
Our bounteous mother earth teems with her kind,
The meadows loose their bosoms to the warmth
Of western breezes, and a gentle dew
Hangs over all ; so that the tender herb
Fears not the coming of each new-born sun,
Nor do the young vine-branches dread the assault
Of southern tempest, nor the north wind's might,
Driving the torrent rains across the sky,
But break in bud, unfurling leaf on leaf.

Methinks 'twas such another day—and such
A drift of days—that in the dawn of time
Lit a young world.

For surely then 'twas spring—
The spacious earth was basking in the spring—
The chill east winds forbore their wintry blasts,
When first the cattle drank in draughts of light,
When first man's iron race upreared its head
From the hard field, when first the beasts were
sent
To fill the woods, and stars the sky.

In truth,
Natures so dainty could not brook the strain
Did not such blessed respite intervene
Between the cold and heat, and kindly heaven
Vouchsafe this gracious welcoming to earth.

But to our work.

When'er you plant your land
With tender scions be ye sure to strew
Rich compost round, and hide them well with earth,
Or bury by their roots rough-coated shells,
Or bibulous sandstone. Thus in years to come
Shall waters filter down, and subtle airs
Steal through the soil, and hearten all your shoots.

Some men there are who shield the plants with stones
And massy tiles, bulwarks against the rain,
Or sultry dog-star as he cleaves the fields
That gape with drought.

When your young vines are set,
Needs must you break the earth about their roots
Once and again, and ply the stalwart hoe,
Or by deep dint of ploughshare stir the soil,

And up and down the very vineyard drive
Your labouring team.

And next must you prepare
Smooth wands, and shaftlike branches, whittled white,
And staves of ashen wood, and sturdy forks,
Whose might withal may teach your vines to soar,
And scorn the gale, and thread the latticed boughs
Up the high elms.

Now while your new-born leaves
Wax with the spring of life fail not to spare
Their tender growth ; and while the glad shoot leaps
Towards the heavens, and with unbridled course
Speeds through the limpid air, forbid the knife
E'en for the trunk itself, but here and there
With prudent finger-tips pluck out the buds.

When by-and-by your vines have crept aloft,
Winding with lusty stems around the elms,
Clip ye the leaf and trim the branch : no more
Do they abhor the steel. The time has come
To play the tyrant, and to curb apace
Those wandering boughs.

Moreover must you weave
Fences of wattle, wards against the kine.
This chiefly so whilst yet the leaves are green,
And all unconscious of their woes to come.
For to harsh winters and imperious suns
Are sent for our undoing further plagues.
The vineyards furnish sport for woodland ox
And troublous roe ; or pasturage for sheep
And greedy heifers. Since no winter dew,
Crystalled in hoary rime, no summer sun,
Smiting amain the thirsty cliffs, can vie

In mischief with those flocks, whose venom'd teeth
Gnaw at the stem, and brand it with a scar.

Ay, for this very crime we offer up
A goat to Bacchus at his frequent fanes ;
Hence came old Tragedy to tread our stage ;
And hence the sons of Theseus first ordained
Prizes for rustic wits at village fairs
Or round the crossway altars ; hence again
The goatskins, oil-besmeared, whereon youths dance
In their gay cups, adown the velvet sward.

And hence Ausonian farmers, sons of Troy,
With artless rhymes and laughter free as air
Make holiday, and don their fearsome masks
Of hollow bark ; and call on thee aloud,
Bacchus, with joyful song.

Then do they hang,
High in thy honour on some lofty pine,
The tiny images that swing and smile.
Whose virtue clothes the vineyards round about
With lavish harvests, bids the hollow vale,
The steepy mountain gorge—yea, every spot
Whereto the god inclines his comely head—
Teem with abundance.

Hence we celebrate
The solemn rites of Bacchus, and we chant
Our fathers' litanies, and bear aloft
Platter and cake, and to his altars lead
The victim goat by the horns, whose luscious flesh
On spits of hazelwood anon shall roast.

Yet further care your cherished vines demand—
A never-ending task ; for year by year,

Thrice and again, must all the ground be tilled,
And the clods broken with the constant hoe,
And the trees lightened of redundant shade,

So shall your toil come alway circling back
As the years roll along their wonted grooves.

For lo! no sooner have the vineyards shed
Their lingering foliage, and the chill north wind
Shattered the leafy glories of the woods,
Than your keen farmer looks to next year's work,
And, with a stroke of Saturn's sickle, prunes
And harasses his vines anew, and moulds
Their fashion as he cleaves.

Be ever first

To trench the soil, and first to bear away
And burn the branches that you lop, and first

To house once more the vine poles, but be last
To garner in your vintage.

Twice a year
The shadowy leafage overwhelms the vines,
And twice dense growth of weeds and throng of briars
Creeps o'er the yield : or this or that alike
An irksome task. Ay, your broad acres serve
To brag about ; but when you come to plough,
The less the better.

Likewise must you cut
Lithe shoots of woodland butcher's broom, and reeds
That grow along the margins of the stream,
Nor shall the wilding osiers spare your toil.
Nay, when the vines are bound, and sickles lie
Idle amongst them ; when, the day's work done,

Your last man in the vineyard sings aloud
Over the utmost rank—why, even then
You needs must rack the land, and stir the dust,
And tremble lest Jove strike your purpled grapes.

Far otherwise the olives ; for they need
No fostering care, nor seek the pruning-hook,
Nor mordant rake, when once their roots have gripped
Deep down the soil, and learned to brave the winds.
For the kind earth, once by the ploughshare riven,
Yields sap in plenty to the youngling plants,
And, by the selfsame aid, lush crops anon.
Wherewith do thou in mellow fulness breed
The olive, dear to Peace.

And you shall see
How fruit trees, haply conscious of the might
Of their young boles, and heritage of strength,

Leap skywards of their own accord, nor crave
Our succouring a jot.

Meanwhile around
The trees are groaning with their bulk of fruit,
The haunts of woodland birds are all ablaze
With blood-red berries ; fodder for the herd
The bosky clovers yield ; from overhead
Pines fling their torches, shedding ample flames,
To feed our fires o' nights.

And shall mankind
Forbear to plant the land and grudge their toil ?

Why dwell on lofty trees ? Even lowly brooms,
And willows furnish foliage for our kine,
Shade for our shepherds, wattles for our crops,
And provender for bees.

What joy to view
Cytorus with its sea of wavy box,
Or groves of Locrian firs ! What joy to mark
Fields that owe naught to tillage or the care
Of any man !

Ay, barren forests crown
The peak of Caucasus, which wild east winds
Are rending—riving ceaselessly ; and yet
Each has its harvest—timber good and true—
Pines for our ships, cedars and cypresses
To deck our homes :

Whence also farmers carve
Spokes for their wheels and rollers for their wains,
And bend the shallop's keel. Lo ! sallows yield
Withies in plenty, and the elms their leaves ;

Myrtle and cornel-tree, the friend of war,
Strong shafts for javelins ; and yews are bent
For Ituraean bows. Nor does smooth lime,
Nor box, obedient to the busy lathe,
Ploughed by the sharpened steel, due form refuse.
And the light alders, launched upon the Po,
Swim o'er its violent flood ; and swarming bees
Are caged in hives of bark, or hollow trunk
Of some dead oak.

What gifts does Bacchus bring
Of like account? Bacchus! Why, he has proved
The cause of very crime. 'Twas he, forsooth,
Maddened the Centaur-folk, and made them bow
The knee to death—Rhaetus and Pholus too.
And eke Hylaeus with his giant bowl
Flaunting the faces of the Lapithae.

O happy, happy Toiler in the fields,
Thine own rare happiness didst thou but know,
Spoilt child of Fortune !

For thy simple wants,
Far from the clash of armoured battle, Earth,
The ever-faithful, out of a willing lap
Scatters her ready store.

For thee, in truth,
No sumptuous palace with imperial gates
Pours from its countless halls morn after morn
A flood of courtiers ; true, thou mayst not gloat,
With open mouth, o'er jamb and lintel pranked
With costly tortoise shell ; nor gaze and gape
At tapestries wrought with strange conceits of gold,
Or statues moulded of Corinthian bronze ;

Nor are thy snowy fleeces stained with dyes
Of Tyrian purple; nor thy limpid oil
Marred with the scent of cinnamon;

And yet
Unbroken peace—a life that knows no guile,
With treasures manifold are thine. For thee
The spacious freedom of the open fields,
Caverns, and living lakes, and dewy dales,
And lowing cattle, and sweet slumber-time
Under the forest trees; and woodland glade,
And haunt of bird and beast; and rustic youth,
Patient to labour, bred to scanty fare;
And reverend age, and worship of the gods.
Methinks the feet of Justice lingered here
Last as she fled from earth.

But for myself
First, and above all other aims, I pray

The gracious Muses, whose poor priest am I,
For the great love which thrills my inmost soul,
That they may take me to themselves, and teach
The starry ways of heaven, the sun's eclipse,
The travail of the moon ; whence earthquakes spring ;
What forces move the unfathomed, turbulent sea
To burst its natural bonds, and sink again
Back to the tranquil deeps ; why winter days
So promptly quench their sunshine in the waves,
And what slow spell delays the lingering nights.

But if this may not be—if I, perchance,
Am too faint-hearted, and too chill of blood
To scale the summits of the universe—
Then let the meadows and the running brooks
Be my especial joy, and bid me love,
Without a thought of fame, the streams and woods.

O let me dwell amid the grassy downs
That fringe Spercheus, or beside thy slopes,
Taygetus, whereon the Spartan girls
Keep Bacchic feast! O who will set my feet
In coolest vales of Haemus, sheltered o'er
By leafy canopies of boundless shade?

Happy the poet unto whom is given
The secret of created things: who casts
Pitiless death and dread beneath his feet,
And scorns the roar of greedy Acheron.
But happy none the less is he who holds
Communion with the woodland gods—with Pan,
And old Sylvanus, and the sister Nymphs.

He cares not for the honours of the State,
Nor kingly purple; neither fears the brawls
That break the bond of brotherhood; nor heeds

The swoop of Dacian legions from the banks
Of mighty Rome, nor all her neighbour kings
Doomed to defeat ; nor ever does he weep
With him that wants, or envy him that hath.

But plucks the fruitage that the boughs bestow,
And takes the gifts the willing meadows yield.
Blind to the forum of the madding town,
The rigour of the iron-hearted law,
The Courts which chronicle the deeds of Rome.
Whilst elsewhere men fret the darkling seas
With venturous oars ; or headlong dash to arms ;
Or win a secret way within the walls
And palaces of kings.

And this man sacks
Cities, and havocks all their household gods
Just for a jewelled cup, or dainty couch
Of Tyrian purple.

Here is one that digs

A grave to shroud his wealth, and, couching, broods
Over the golden hoard ; another stares
Up at the Rostrum in dumb ecstasy ;
Whilst this, like one bewitched, listens agape
As waves of plaudits through the theatre sweep
Again and yet again, from all alike,
Plebs and Patricians.

Others vaunt themselves

Whose hands are dabbled with a brother's blood,
Barter away the hearths and homes they loved
For lifelong banishment, and seek anew
Another country under other suns.

Meanwhile our simple farmer tills the land

With the curved plough : his task year after year,

The mainstay of his country and his home,
His children's children, and his droves of kine,
And faithful steers.

Nor ever do the months
Slacken their yield, but teem with copious fruit,
With young of cattle and with sheaves of corn,
And heap the harvest in the furrowy field
Till the barns burst.

Then comes the winter-time ;
His olive mills are busy with the grist
Of Sicyon's berries, and his swine troop home
Sleek and well-liking from their fill of mast,
And arbutë flings him largess in the woods.

Or autumn comes and lays its varied store
Down at his feet, whilst on the cliffs above
The vintage basks and mellows in the sun.

THE GEORGICS OF VIRGIL

Ay, and sweet little ones shall climb and cling
Close to his lips ; and spotless virtue guard
The innocence of home.

His cows around
With pendulous udders promise stores of milk,
And fat kids tussle on the merry turf
With combatant horns.

And he, the lord of all,
Keeps holiday, and lies upon the grass,
Whilst boon companions crown the bowl with flowers
Around the sacred fire, and pour the wine
With due libations ; calling unto thee,
Lord of the wine-press, Father of the vine.

Then does he set a mark upon the elm,
And make a match for wingèd javelins

Amongst his shepherds ; or perchance they bare
Their hardy bodies for some wrestling bout
In country fashion.

So in days of yore
Lived the old Sabines ; and so Remus lived,
And Romulus, his brother : in such wise,
Etruria waxed in strength ; and so, O Rome,
Didst thou become the glory of the world,
And in one city's battlement embrace
Thy seven hills.

And so did Saturn live
King of the golden age : ere Jove had grasped
The sceptre ; and ere graceless man had slain
His faithful ox, and batted on its flesh.

Whilst yet no warlike clarions woke the world,
Nor iron anvils rang with hammered swords.

But lo! our course has journeyed far and wide
O'er boundless plains; 'tis time to unyoke our steeds,
And loose the harness from their reeking necks.



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